

African American Leaders in the PC(USA)

Charles Marks, Jr.



The Rev. Dr. Charles Marks, Jr.'s spiritual roots were cultivated at Butler United Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia where he, his parents Charles Sr. and Eldora, and other family members were active. After completing secondary school at A. E. Beach High, Marks attended Knoxville College. He graduated in 1964 with majors in Sociology and Religion and immediately went on to attend Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (PTS). At PTS Marks met his future spouse, Amal Rizkallah Halaby. Halaby, who was born and raised in Lebanon, would become an organizer of the National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus, and the couple's family would grow to include their two children, Ameer and Reema.

After completing his master's in divinity in 1967, Marks answered a call to the Urban Intern Project, which was sponsored by the Board of National Missions through Olivet Presbyterian Church in Chicago. When the pastor of Olivet resigned, Marks was asked to step into the role. During his time at Olivet, he not only saw to his pastoral responsibilities, but he also served on Chicago Presbytery's Urban Crisis Commission and Illinois Synod's Committee on Church and Race. He joined the efforts of North Side Cooperative Ministry and SCLC Operation Breadbasket; he helped develop a youth program called REACH that was designed to build power through education in Black and Puerto Rican communities; and he committed additional time to teaching high school students and advising Black students at McCormick Theological Seminary.

In 1969, Marks was invited to return to Pittsburgh's Bidwell Street Presbyterian Church. There he stepped into a call to associate pastor where his responsibilities included directing Bidwell's Community Center. This combination of pastoral care and community involvement became even more fully blended in Marks's vocational life when the Synod of Southern California called him in 1973 to resource churches in developing and redeveloping ministries that would meet the needs of urban Los Angeles. In this capacity he provided staff support for the Black Advisory Committee, which was a coalition of the synod's eleven predominantly Black Presbyterian churches. Marks stepped further into urban and racial ethnic ministries through national committee work, significantly, as a member of the Task Force on Improving Prospects of Minorities in the Ministries of the Church. In each of these roles—and others as he completed a Doctor of Ministry at San Francisco Theological Seminary (SFTS), as he accepted a call to SFTS chaplain, and as he served as interim pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles—Marks lived and demonstrated the inseparable connection between ministry to the church and service beyond the church.



PC(USA) staff visit to Israel/Palestine, 2000. Charles and Amal are standing in the front row, second and third from the right. From the Amal Halaby Marks papers.



Read more about Charles Marks, Jr. on the PHS blog
history.pcusa.org/about/blog/african-american-leaders-series



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